

Clean Water Action Plan Summary

1. Improve assurance that fish & shellfish are safe to eat.

Key action: EPA and NOAA will conduct a national survey of mercury and other contaminant levels in fish and shellfish throughout the country during the period 1998-2000. This effort will be coordinated with state and tribal efforts to maximize geographic coverage.

Key action: EPA will work with NOAA and other federal agencies, states, tribes, and other interested parties to adopt, by December 1999, nationally consistent processes for monitoring water quality and fish tissue, and review EPA guidelines for decision-making on issuance of fish consumption advisories. EPA will support state actions and, after consultation with the state, will issue fish consumption advisories if a state fails to do so.

Key action: In 1998, EPA and ATSDR will develop a brochure in Spanish and Asian languages explaining how to reduce the health risks of exposure to contaminants in locally caught fish and shellfish. The brochure will be given to pediatricians, obstetricians, and health care organizations for distribution to public, particularly women with children. Identifying the health risks of eating noncommercial fish and shellfish contaminated with PCBs and explaining how women and children can reduce risks. In 1998, NOAA will report on the status of shellfish bed conditions nationally and the factors contributing to areas of harvest limitation. This report will link shellfish bed conditions and watersheds for use in assessments.

Key action: EPA will direct enforcement and compliance assistance efforts, together with state and local authorities, at regulated sources contributing to conditions leading to closures of shellfish areas. These efforts will address sanitary sewer overflows, combined sewer overflows, storm water discharges, wet-weather discharges that contain substantial amounts of contaminants, and other point sources that are not discharging in compliance with applicable requirements.

2. Insure beaches are safe for swimming.

Key action: In early 1998, EPA will release a BEACH Action Plan describing priority actions for federal, state, tribal and local implementation of beach monitoring and notification programs. The BEACH Action Plan will include priority research, training, and guidance needs for the implementing agencies.

Key action: in 1998, EPA will develop a specific plan and schedule for the development of a new generation of microbiological criteria for nationally protective beach water quality standards. New standards will be issued by 2003. The plan will include necessary research and interagency coordination, and describe the transition from the total coliforms/fecal coliforms currently in most state and tribal water quality standards to EPA's recommended E.coli and Enterococcus criteria, and new indicators for ear, skin, and respiratory infections. To ensure a nationally consistent system, EPA will establish a schedule for federal promulgation of standards where states fail to enact protective measures.

Key action: EPA will direct enforcement and compliance assistance efforts, together with state and local authorities, at regulated sources contributing to beach closings. These efforts will address sanitary sewer overflows, combined sewer overflows, storm water discharges, wet weather discharges that contain substantial amounts of contaminants, and other point sources that are not discharging in compliance with applicable requirements.

3. **Ensure source water protection for drinking water**

Key action in October 1998, EPA will lead an agreement among federal agencies for directing program authorities, technical assistance, data, and enforcement resources to help states, tribes, and local communities design and implement their drinking water source water assessment and protection programs within the unified watershed protection and restoration efforts. This agreement will draw on program authorities under relevant laws to assign priority to drinking water source water areas needing protection.

Key action: EPA will increase enforcement and compliance assistance in those watersheds where sources of drinking water are contaminated or threatened.

4. **Reduce exposure to endocrine disrupting pollutants.**

Key action in response to the requirements of the Food Quality Protection Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act, EPA will publish in 1998 a strategy for evaluating chemicals for their potential to cause effects through endocrine disruption, will implement the strategy no later than 1999, and provide Congress with a status report on this work by the end of 2000.

Key action: EPA will address recommendations in the National Academy of Sciences' report on endocrine disruption and develop an appropriate national strategy.

5. **Enhance natural resource stewardship.**

Key action: by 1999, DOI and USDA, in consultation with other federal agencies, states and tribes, and other stakeholders, will develop a Unified Federal Policy to enhance watershed management for the protection of water quality and the health of aquatic ecosystems on federal lands.

6. **Sustain forest health to protect watersheds & water quality.**

Key action: by 2000, land management agencies will implement a strategy for assessing threats to watersheds and water quality stemming from forest health, and for targeting fuel treatments or other techniques to priority watersheds most threatened by damage from disease and wildfire.

Key action in consultation with other federal agencies and states, in 1999, EPA will consider whether to revise Clean Water Act permit regulations relative to forest roads and develop a pilot permit program for forest roads on federal lands.

Key action: The BLM, the U.S. Forest Service, and other federal land management agencies will implement an accelerated program to improve or restore 25,000 miles of stream corridor by 2005.

Key action: by 2000, land management agencies will implement a strategy for assessing threats to watersheds and water quality stemming from forest health, and for targeting fuel treatments or other techniques to priority watersheds most threatened by damage from disease and wildfire.

Key action: The U.S. Forest Service, the BLM, and the EPA will develop and implement a strategy for assisting states and tribes in watershed-based assessments and actions where urban-rural interactions threaten forest health and water quality.

7. Improve the health of federal rangelands.

Key action: The U.S. FOREST Service and the BLM will accelerate range allotment planning, implement management changes, and accelerate restoration actions to restore the sustainability, function, and diversity of rangeland ecosystems. This process will be accomplished through improved allotment management decisions; development by the year 2000 of a standardized rangeland health inventory, classification, and monitoring system in accordance with the BLM, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and the U.S. Forest Service; adoption of comprehensive guideline for managing resources now at risk; and restoration of stream, riparian and other degraded areas.

Key action: by 2002, the U.S. Forest Service, the BLM, and the Natural Resources Conservation service will develop and implement rangeland vegetation classifications; establish baseline inventory data and an interagency training program for rangeland inventory and monitoring; and aggressively begin to implement management changes and restoration activities to eliminate ecological, management, or erosion problems that cause degraded water quality.

8. Prevent water pollution from abandoned / active mines.

Key action: Using the approach outlined in the interdepartmental Abandoned Mine Lands Watershed Initiative, Federal land managers will work in partnership with EPA, state agencies, tribes, private parties, and other interested groups to accelerate the rate of cleanup of watersheds affected by abandoned hard rock mines. With special emphasis on ensuring that viable responsible parties contribute their share of cleanup costs, federal land managers will, beginning in 1999, add three to five watersheds or major mine cleanup actions to the program each year through 2005. The USDA program is expected to meet a substantial portion of this target. USDA targets for 1999 include investigation and cleanup on an estimated 50 hard rock mine sites. Responsible parties have performed over \$30 million in work on federal lands managed by USDA during the past two years.

Key action: by 1999, federal land management agencies and EPA will forge a partnership, consistent with the watershed-shed strategy described above and building on the existing Memorandum of Understanding, to help resolve issues and enhance review, planning, and operations for active mining operations.

Key action: by 2000, the Office of Surface Mining in DOI, in cooperation with EPA and land management agencies, will increase by 50 % the number of cooperative projects to clean up rivers and streams polluted by coal mine drainage. The Office of Surface Mining will continue to work with key local stakeholders, including watershed associations, state, and tribal agencies, and local units of government.

Key action: EPA will revise effluent guideline to better address coal mining in arid western areas, and will develop new effluent guidelines to address coal re-mining operations.

9. Increase understanding of ecosystem at the watershed scale.

Key action: by 2000, the U.S. Forest Service, the BLM, USGS, and EPA will test the watershed analysis process developed under the Northwest Forest Plan for subsequent application in targeted watersheds, representing a diversity of major ecosystem types throughout the country.

Key action: by 2000, the Bureau of Reclamation, with assistance from USGS, will assess water quality of reservoirs and streams affected by the Bureau's operations and, by 2003, develop strategies in cooperation with others for water quality improvements.

10. Permits licenses, & leases on federal land to protect water quality.

Key action: Federal land and resource management agencies will work with states and tribes to immediately begin a review of existing processes to ensure that the issuance and renewal of use authorizations and licences, adequately address water quality protection, monitoring, and compliance measures and will revise and upgrade those processes as needed by 2000. By 2005, federal agencies will amend use authorizations and licenses, as authorities allow, to: require appropriate monitoring; protect or enhance watershed and stream health; use specific state and tribal best management practice requirements; and ensure compliance with water quality standards.

11. Restore & protect America's wetlands.

Key action: The Administration will work with Congress to expand the Wetlands Reserve Program to allow up to 250,000 acres of wetlands each year. In conjunction with other agricultural incentive programs, this initiative will enable the enrollment of 150,000 acres for wetlands restoration in 2005 and subsequent years.

Key action: by 2005, the Corps will increase by at least 50% the wetlands restored and enhanced through its programs. This includes wetlands restored as part of the President's "Riverine Ecosystem and Flood Hazard Mitigation" program in the FY 1999 budget and succeeding years.

12. A net increase of 100,000 acres of wetlands per year by 2005.

Key action: The Corps, EPA, USDA, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and NOAA, through the institute for Water Resources, will initiate a review of the effectiveness of wetlands mitigation banking by an independent body, such as the National Academy of Sciences or a science/environmental advisory board by the year 2000.

Key action: by 2005, working with Wetlands and River Corridor Restoration Partners, a group of 30 governmental and non-governmental organizations involved in habitat restoration, EPA will have cooperated on wetland projects in 500 watersheds.

Key action: by 2005, NOAA will increase the acreage of wetlands restored annually, to improve coastal water quality and benefit living marine resources, by encouraging wetlands restoration planning in state coastal zone management programs, and by continuing state and local partnerships under the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Program settlement funds and community-based restoration funds. NOAA also will work with other federal, state, tribal, and local agencies to encourage the use of existing wetland restoration programs in coastal areas.

Key action in the enforcement programs, EPA and the Corps will emphasize restoration and mitigation of wetlands as remedies for section 404 violations. EPA will also use Supplemental Environmental Projects [SEPs] that restore wetlands as remedies in programs enforcing non-404 requirements of law. Compliance with permit conditions will also be monitored and improved.

Key action: The Federal Highway Administration will increase net wetlands acreage resulting from federal-aid highway projects by 50% in 10 years, and will finance wetland mitigation projects for remediation of adverse effects from past federal aid highway improvements when such projects are determined to be appropriate and reasonable by the project sponsors.

13. Geographic-based planning to protect & restore wetlands.

Key action: The Fish And Wildlife Service, NOAA, the Corps, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and EPA, coordinating with states and tribes, will improve access to information on programs for wetlands and other habitat. Such information will be made available to geographic-based planners through toll-free help lines, the Internet, one stop information centers, dedicated staff for outreach, and/or newsletters and other publications.

14. Expand federal coastal programs to protect coastal waters, including approving & implementing State coastal polluted runoff control programs.

Key action: NOAA and EPA will support the efforts of coastal states to reduce polluted runoff that may contribute to local or regional *Pfiesteria* problems, by providing technical and financial assistance for implementation of state coastal nonpoint pollution control programs under the Coastal Zone Act Reauthorization Amendments and state nonpoint source management programs under the Clean Water Act.

Key action: NOAA, DOI, EPA, USDA, and other federal agencies will work with state, academia, and others to implement the current National Harmful Algal Bloom Research and Monitoring Strategy. The interagency strategy addresses characterization of environmental conditions likely to support toxic species, predictions of the onset of conditions conducive to bloom formation, and means to prevent, control, or mitigate their impacts.

Key action: NOAA and Regional Fishery Management Councils will amend Fisheries Management Plans, including the identification of essential fish habitat, by October 1998. The amended Fisheries Management Plans will include options and recommendations to minimize adverse effects caused by state or federal activities.

Key action: The Corps and EPA will expand their efforts to promote the beneficial use of dredged materials to restore critical coastal habitats.

15. Developing incentives for private land stewardship.

Key action: In the current effort to develop federal policies and actions to strengthen America's communities, the interagency Work Group on Sustainable Communities will identify new mechanisms and needed revisions to existing policy to support locally initiated smart growth efforts that have benefits for water quality.

Key action: EPA will develop a means to credit pollution load reductions from local growth management efforts in the Total Maximum Daily Loads submitted by states and tribes to EPA under the Clean Water Act.

16. Restore riparian areas & establish conservation buffers.

Key action: Before December 1999, USDA, EPA, DOI, the Corps, Tennessee Valley Authority, NOAA, and other partners will showcase the application of stream corridor restoration technology in 12 demonstration project areas for water quality improvement.

Key action: By 2002, USDA, working with federal, state, tribal, and private partners, will establish two million miles of conservation buffers on agricultural lands to prevent pollution and help meet water quality goals. USDA will review and increase, where appropriate, the incentives available under the Conservation Reserve Program continuous sign-up, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Wetlands Reserve Program, and the Forestry and Stewardship Incentives Programs to ensure that incentives are adequate to establish two million miles of buffers by 2002.

Key action: USDA will reserve four million acres from the Conservation Reserve Program for the establishment of conservation buffers.

Key action: USDA will issue a Federal Register notice by early 1998 announcing the availability of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program [CREP] and providing programmatic and administrative guidance to states for submitting proposals for CREP agreements.

Key action: USDA will work with states to help develop proposals leading to as many CREP agreements as practicable to address critical water quality, soil erosion, and fish and wildlife habitat needs, including those for threatened and endangered species.

17. Reduce risks associated with more efficient fertilizer and pesticide use.

Key action: USDA will work with private insurance companies and foundations to review the feasibility of providing an insurance program that enables producers to offset risks of utilizing new technologies to manage fertilizers and pesticides to prevent pollution. USDA will assist in developing public-private partnerships that facilitate risk protection policies and programs for producers adopting pollution prevention systems.

Key action: USDA will lead a task force to work with agricultural producers, businesses, and interested constituencies to explore the feasibility of defining standards and establishing a “Blue Water” marketing recognition program to identify agricultural products produced under sound environmental management guidelines.

18. Strengthen state & tribal polluted runoff programs.

Key action: EPA and other federal agencies will provide technical assistance to states and tribes to help upgrade polluted runoff programs to address all nine key program elements. Beginning in FY 1999, EPA and all states, territories, and tribes will expedite incorporation of nine key elements established in national guidance into section 319 Nonpoint Source Management Programs. Also in FY 1999, EPA will advise states and tribes that, beginning in FY 2000, EPA will award any section 319 monies exceeding the \$100 million authorized level only to those states and tribes that have incorporated all nine key elements into an approved section 319 Nonpoint Source Management Program.

19. Help states & tribes implement strengthen non-point source programs.

Key action: Severe erosion along access roads on Cherokee tribal trust lands was adding 150 tons of soil per acre each year to nearby streams, degrading habitat for animals. With the help of an EPA Clean Water Act section 319 grant, sections of the road were re-graded and re-seeded to permanent vegetation. Since its completion, soil loss has fallen to less than six tons of soil per year. Now, species of bear, deer, and small game birds are active in the area and stream habitats have improved; native trout have returned to many streams.

20. Improve antidegradation policies to reduce polluted runoff.

Key action: EPA will develop guidance that more specifically defines expectations and procedures for states to follow in fully implementing antidegradation policies related to polluted runoff and will publish final guidance on this subject by December 1998.

21. Improve state and tribal enforceable authorities.

Key action: EPA and, in coastal states and territories NOAA, will promote by the year 2000 the establishment of enforceable state and tribal authorities needed to ensure the implementation of nonpoint source controls to achieve water quality standards. EPA, in consultation with NOAA, will publish guidelines describing existing and potential models of enforceable authority related to polluted runoff and will assist states and tribes in this effort.

22. Increase commitment of clean water loan funds to polluted runoff.

Key action: EPA will work with states to increase the number and dollar amount of loans made through clean water revolving loan fund programs for priority projects to prevent polluted runoff, with the goal of increasing the annual percentage of funds loaned for this purpose to at least 10 % [or about \$200 million] by the year 2001. EPA will also work with states toward the goal of increasing to 25 the number of states using integrated priority-setting systems to make clean water funding decisions by the year 2000.

23. Reduce nutrient over-enrichment.

Key action: EPA will establish, by the year 2000, numeric criteria for nutrients [i.e., nitrogen and phosphorus] that are tailored to reflect the different types of water bodies [e.g., lakes, rivers, and estuaries] and the different ecoregions of the country, and will assist states in adopting numeric water quality standards based on these criteria over the following three years. If a state does not adopt appropriate nutrient standards, EPA will begin the process of promulgating nutrient standards.

24. Assess & reduce air deposition of nitrogen.

Key action: EPA and NOAA will work with other federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies and others to better quantify the risks associated with atmospheric deposition of nitrogen compounds and other pollutants to water bodies.

Key action: EPA will work through the TMDL program to evaluate the linkage of air emissions to the water quality impacts to help determine appropriate reduction actions. EPA will work with states, tribes, and federal land management agencies to employ both Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act authorities to reduce air deposition of nitrogen compounds and other pollutants that adversely affect water quality. EPA will develop a report on methods for this work by the spring of 1999.

25. Improve subsurface sewage disposal.

Key action: In 1998, EPA will publish technical guidance providing detailed information on onsite sewage disposal management programs, performance standards, water conservation techniques, and alternative and innovative onsite disposal system designs. EPA will also. In 1999, develop voluntary national standards for onsite management programs that address siting, performance, design, and maintenance of these systems.

Key action: EPA will promote the use, where appropriate, of centralized management of decentralized wastewater systems. This initiative will include financial and technical support of state, tribal, and local efforts to consolidate management of decentralized wastewater programs so that they are consistently managed and administered. Beginning in 1999, EPA will also fund projects that demonstrate how to overcome barriers to decentralized sewage management. EPA will publish guidance on the appropriate use of state loan funds to support these systems in 1999.

26. Expand control of storm water runoff from cities & construction sites.

Key action: EPA will publish final regulations in 1999 on Phase II of the storm water program, consider public comments on the proposal, and work with states, tribes, municipalities, and the regulated community to make sure that storm water control measures are implemented as required.

Key action: EPA will focus its compliance assistance and enforcement resources on addressing noncompliance with existing Phase I storm water requirements by targeting priority watersheds where storm water is of concern.

27. Substantially reduce pollution from animal feeding operations.

Key action: EPA will publish and, after public comments, implement an AFO Strategy for important and necessary EPA actions on standards and permits by March 1998.

Key action: EPA and USDA will jointly develop a unified national strategy to minimize the environmental and public health impacts of AFOs. This Unified Strategy will be published for public review and comment in July 1998 and will be finalized in November 1998.

28. Develop incentives for reducing polluted runoff.

Key action: EPA will develop a means to credit pollution load reductions from local growth management efforts in the Total Maximum Daily Loads submitted by states and tribes to EPA under the Clean Water Act.

Key action: The Council on Environmental Quality will develop guidance to ensure that National Environmental Policy Act analysis fully considers the secondary impacts that can be avoided by smart growth policies.

Key action: An interagency task force will, in consultation with the Department of the Treasury, identify and assess tax incentive proposals related to water pollution prevention and natural resource enhancement and identify potential changes, with any appropriate offsets, for proposal in future budgets.

29. Enforcement & compliance assistance.

Key action: By October 1998, EPA will develop guidance to support cooperative efforts to ensure that compliance assistance and enforcement is used to effectively address noncompliance problems on a priority watershed basis.

30. Improve monitoring & assessment.

Key action: The National Water Quality Monitoring Council will, by the end of 2000, compare sampling and laboratory methods and protocols leading to performance-based acceptable methods; establish reference parameters for specific monitoring purposes; identify core environmental indicators; establish consistent use of biological metrics; and develop guidelines on quality assurance and control.

Key action: The National Water Quality Monitoring Council, in coordination with the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, will publish a national report describing current state of monitoring and models for assessing sources and impacts of polluted runoff; critical gaps and targeted areas in need of monitoring and modeling; priority polluted runoff research and assessment projects; and recommendations for improvements, including institutional roles and reporting of results at watershed, tribal, state, and national levels.

31. Measuring progress & reporting results.

Key action: In 1999, EPA, in collaboration with other federal agencies and states, will initiate a tracking system to report key indicators of the success of programs to reduce nutrient runoff to waters.

32. Restoring aquatic system health on a watershed basis.

Key action: Federal agencies will provide technical assistance or funding support for state efforts to develop unified assessments of watershed health.

Key action: By October 1998, states and tribes should work with appropriate agencies, organizations, and the public to define watershed restoration priorities, with special attention to watersheds most in need of restoration and protection. This schedule must be coordinated with section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act and provide an opportunity to bundle Total Maximum Daily Loads on a watershed scale. The schedule should identify the highest priority watersheds to be addressed in the first two years (through 2000).

Key action: EPA, in cooperation with other federal agencies, states, tribes, will upgrade the National Index of Watershed Indicators in 1998 to support unified watershed assessments and to assist in evaluating the priority-setting process.

33. Watershed assistance grants.

Key action: Beginning in FY 1999, federal agencies will coordinate with states and tribes to provide small grants to enable organizations to build watershed partnerships and advance watershed restoration efforts.

34. Expand watershed training

Key action: In 1998, federal agencies will complete an inventory of watershed training programs. Relevant offerings will be promoted through the Watershed Academy and through other means, as appropriate. From 1999 on, EPA and other federal agencies will join together with states, territories, tribes and other organizations to expand and improve watershed training offerings.